



Title

The importance of structural factors and individual orientations for the sports participation of youth – a comparison between German and French-speaking municipalities in Switzerland

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Abstract

Introduction

Sport participation in the Swiss population differs considerably depending on the linguistic region. The German-speaking population shows a higher sports activity than French or Italian-speaking citizens of Switzerland (Lamprecht, Fischer, & Stamm, 2014). This study analyses how different structural conditions in the municipalities (e. g. sports facilities, significance of the municipal promotion of sports) and sports-related orientations of individuals (e. g. sports- and body-related thought and behaviour orientations) across the German and French-speaking regions of Switzerland correlate with sport participation of adolescents and young adults.

Methods

According to the theory of social action (Coleman, 1994), individual behaviour is not only determined by the individual, but also by the structural factors in which a person is socially embedded. In order to identify possible structural factors, a written survey and a qualitative interview were conducted with municipal sport leaders ($n = 36$) in German and French-speaking municipalities. In addition, sports providers in the selected municipalities ($n = 294$) completed an online survey about their sports offer. Individual factors pertaining to adolescents and young adults, such as sports behaviour, the perception of structural characteristics in the municipality and thought and behaviour orientations related to sports and the body, were collected through an online survey of the 15- to 30-year-old population ($N = 4'039$, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.5$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 4.64$).

Results

Sports participation and the relative number of club memberships is significantly higher in German-speaking municipalities (84%) compared to the French-speaking ones (76.1%) ($\chi^2(1, N = 4'039) = 34.317$, $p < .001$). This difference corresponds to the greater importance of local sports policy in German-speaking municipalities ($M = 3.29$) compared to the French-speaking municipalities ($M = 3.00$). On the individual level, adolescents and young adults in the French-speaking municipalities are less satisfied with the opportunities to be physically active in the environment ($t(2938) = 7.311$, $p < .001$) and commute more often to another municipality to practice their main sports activity. In addition, the inhabitants of German-speaking municipalities push themselves more to their limits in sports ($t(3628) = 2.8$, $p < .01$), give more importance to their body appearance ($t(3631) = 7.798$, $p < .001$) and feel better in their bodies during sports activities ($t(3627) = -4.325$, $p < .001$) than their counterparts in the French-speaking areas.

Discussion/Conclusion

These findings show that structural conditions in municipalities as well as the youth's individual perception and individual sports-related orientations may be relevant for the sports participation of adolescents and young adults. However, it must be noted that further research, such as a multilevel analysis, is needed to more precisely analyse linguistic differences in sports participation in Switzerland.

References

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